

# CMS Connection

May 2019

## Director's Monthly Message: Janel L. Forde

Many Illinoisans turn to thoughts of Spring cleaning when the weather invites windows to be opened and the Winter's clutter to be organized or removed. This is a good time for all of us to consider a little Spring cleaning. Look around the office to see what can be better organized or put in storage. If there is accumulated paperwork and files that have piled up, it may also be tempting to recycle or throw them out, but a word of caution here.



The Illinois State Records Act requires each bureau or division create its own record retention schedule to dictate how it keeps and maintains records. The Records Act is the public policy of the State of Illinois that government records are a form of property whose ownership lies with the citizens and with the State of Illinois, and those records cannot be destroyed without first getting approval from the State Records Commission.

So, whether it is a document or an electronic file on one's computer, it is best to always first check with CMS's Records Officer, Paul Olshefsky, who can determine what can and cannot be destroyed. Paul established a **CMS Intranet Records Website** that contains a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section that can answer most of your records-keeping questions. Paul can be reached at [Paul.Olshefsky@Illinois.gov](mailto:Paul.Olshefsky@Illinois.gov) or by phone, at: 217-558-2903.

Nonetheless, with that caution in mind, May is still a good time to consider organizing and cleaning up our offices and workspaces. I know that I feel better after taking the time to do just that. CMS will develop plans for a more formal organizing and cleanup day in the coming months.

The month of May concludes with our Federal holiday, Memorial Day, celebrated on the last Monday of May to honor the men and women who have died while serving in our nation's military. It is also rooted in a tradition of cleaning – it was a day originally set aside following the Civil War for citizens to clean and maintain veterans' graves and cemeteries. At CMS, we honor our veterans in both words and deeds. The State of Illinois is one of just a few states that incorporates an "absolute" veteran preference in its hiring practices.

Our Veterans Outreach Program serves two primary functions. The first is to validate official military documentation and establish veteran's preference with regard to agencies hiring from the open competitive list. "Preference" is granted in two ways. Points are added to a passing exam for those with veteran status. The amount of points granted may vary depending on the nature of the veteran's military service and expertise. The second



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way CMS gives preference is in ensuring that a veteran in the same grade category being considered is offered an interview first. This preference, along with providing additional exam points, only applies to vacancies that make it to the open competitive list.

The second function of the Veterans Outreach Program is found in the form of career counseling. CMS's Veterans Outreach Coordinator offers veteran-candidates advice on how to properly complete the CMS 100 application to improve his or her chances of employment with the State. When the coordinator receives a veteran's CMS 100 employment application, along with transcripts and certifications, they then provide the veteran recommended job titles they should consider pursuing. There are currently over 45,000 veteran-

eligible candidates in the system with either points, preference status or both, and veterans now represent 18% of the State's workforce under the Personnel Code.

CMS's Veterans Business Program (VBP), established in 2011, operates the Veteran-Owned Small Business (VOSB) and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) programs. The VBP continues to be the leader in devoting State contract dollars to veteran-owned businesses. Last year, payments to veteran-owned businesses totaled \$34,151,993 through 87 awarded contracts.

These are real, meaningful efforts to recognize and honor the veterans who have served this nation. Take a moment this month to personally thank a veteran for their service and sacrifice.

## May is Benefits Open Enrollment Month

May 1 – May 31 is the annual Benefit Choice Open Enrollment Period for State employees. This is the only time each year that employees may change their benefit selections. There are however, exceptions for some individuals, such as certain life events that may occur during the year, such as a marriage, divorce or the birth or adoption of a child. But otherwise, this is the time to consider the benefit choices you have made previously and decide whether they continue to be the best options for your personal circumstances.

When it comes to your health insurance coverage, if you do decide that you want to consider changing your health plan or insurance carrier, go online to [MyBenefits.illinois.gov](http://MyBenefits.illinois.gov) as well. Once there, you can review your benefit options and compare health plans, coverage and costs. The online enrollment platform is a one-stop shop for your Benefit choices.

On *MyBenefits*, you can:

- Change telephone number or email address Information
- Update dependent information
- Enroll in a Flexible Spending Account (MCAP or DCAP)
- Add Dependent Coverage (with proper documentation)

### Important Dates to Remember

**MAY 1:** Benefit Choice Period begins.

**MAY 31:** Benefit Choice Period ends.

**JULY 1:** New benefits are effective.

- Drop Dependent Coverage
- Increase or Decrease Optional Life Insurance Coverage (Note: evidence of insurability (EOI) is required to increase life insurance amounts.)

You may also contact the *MyBenefits* Service Center Monday – Friday, 8:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M. CT throughout the year. Representatives are available to answer your questions about navigating *MyBenefits* as well as how to enroll.

### MyBenefits Service Center

**Call Toll-Free: 844-251-1777**

**For TDD/TTY, 844-251-1778**

Perhaps you have a recurring medical expense such as supplies of daily-use contact lenses or you need dental work not covered under your dental insurance plan. Those are examples of expenses you can pay for with tax-free dollars set aside in a Medical Care Assistance

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Plan (MCAP), just one of several benefits you may not be taking advantage of, and May is the time to consider these options. Another benefit available to you to consider is a Dependent Care Assistance Plan (DCAP.) Establishing a DCAP allows employees to pay eligible child and/or adult day care expenses incurred during the plan year with tax-exempt dollars as well. The maximum contribution amount per plan year is \$5,000.

Both the MCAP and DCAP are referred to as Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) and they allow you to decide the amount of pre-tax dollars you want to set aside each pay period. You will find links to complete listings of products and services that each of these FSAs cover and do not cover by visiting [MyBenefits.illinois.gov](http://MyBenefits.illinois.gov). Because the money allocated to your FSA is taken before Social Security and State and Federal taxes are calculated, it also reduces the amount taken from your paycheck each period for those withholdings as well.

When it comes to the health insurance plans offered, there are no changes to any of the health plans this Benefit Choice Period. If you wish to keep your current coverage and insurance carrier, there is no action needed

on your part; your health benefits will continue as previously selected. It is important to remember however, that FSAs are one exception to this rule. If you are already participating in an FSA for Fiscal Year 2019 and want to continue to do so for 2020, you must re-enroll in FSA each plan year. Your FSA will not automatically continue as you have established it.

MCAP participants enrolled in MCAP for FY2020 may “roll over” up to \$500 of their FY2019 unused MCAP account balance after the run-out period ends September 30, 2019. For example, a participant enrolls in MCAP for a total of \$2,700 for FY2020. For the sake of this example, on October 1, 2019, their balance remaining in their FY2019 MCAP account is \$350 therefore, they will have a total of \$3,050 in their MCAP account to use during the FY2020 plan year. **Services provided after June 30th are not eligible for reimbursement with FY2019 funds but may be reimbursed with the FY2020 MCAP funds.**

And, the “roll over” provision applies only to MCAP and does not apply to DCAP accounts. DCAP services are only eligible for reimbursement when provided during the plan year (July 1 through June 30). Services provided after June 30th are not eligible for reimbursement unless enrolled for the FY2020 plan year. For more information on the FSAs offered, visit [MyBenefits.illinois.gov](http://MyBenefits.illinois.gov).

## Safety Corner: Tips to Avoid Becoming a Hazardous Distracted Driver

According to the National Safety Council, every day at least 9 Americans die and 100 are injured in distracted driving crashes. Already this year, 16 Illinois State Police troopers have been struck by vehicles and 3 died as a result, doubling the total from all last year in just the first 4 months of 2019. In some cases, distracted driving is among the suspected causes. Five seconds is the average length of time a driver takes their eyes are off the road if they are texting, and at 55 miles-per-hour, their vehicle travels farther than the length of a football field in that time.

Under Illinois law, it is illegal to use a hand-held cell phone while driving. And, while we live in a wireless, connected world and texting gains the most attention as a cause of distracted driving, we also live in a drive-thru car culture in America. Among the top causes of driver distraction is eating food and drinking beverages. In fact, in an American Automobile Association (AAA) survey, 51 percent of those polled admitted that their driving had



been dangerously compromised at least once due to eating or drinking while behind the wheel.

In addition to texting and eating and drinking, the other eight of the top ten causes of driver distraction, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) are:

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- Making or taking a phone call.
- Being lost in thought or daydreaming.
- People, objects, or events outside the vehicle, such as looking at an accident or another car pulled over on the roadside (rubber-necking.)
- Adjusting music settings, climate control or touchscreen and navigation systems.
- Moving or reaching for objects inside the vehicle.
- Other occupants inside the car, especially if a driver is looking directly at them during a conversation.
- Smoking while driving.
- Driving while tired or drowsy.
- (Dis-)honorable mention: Drivers using headphones or ear buds.

In addition to following all applicable laws and rules of the road, here are some tips to help reduce the risks of becoming distracted behind the wheel:

- ALWAYS – slow down and move over to the farthest lane away from police, fire or ambulance first-responders pulled over on the roadside.
- Turn off electronic devices and put them out of reach before starting to drive.
- Consider the short time it takes to eat outside of the car instead of while driving; eating in a restaurant or at a rest area also provides a break from behind the wheel to refresh.

- Otherwise, stop about every two hours for a break. Get out of the vehicle to stretch or take a brief walk.
- Keep your eyes on the road while speaking to others in the vehicle.
- Speak up when you are a passenger and the driver begins to use an electronic device while driving. Offer to make the call for him or her, so their full attention stays on the task of driving.
- Avoid distractions, such as adjusting the music or other controls, especially if you have a passenger who can do it for you.
- Never use headphones or ear buds while driving.
- Reduce your stress and distractions by planning and knowing your route ahead of time.
- Ensure that you are well-rested before driving and heed any medication warnings regarding their use that may cause drowsiness while driving.
- Continually scan the roadway to be alert to situations requiring quick action, and stay away from other erratic drivers, like those drifting in lanes or speeding up or slowing down; those are indicators of a distracted or impaired driver.
- Avoid aggressive driving and be patient and courteous to other drivers; you will get to your destination just the same.
- Drivers and all passengers are required by law to always use seat belts. Seat belts are the best defense against other unsafe drivers.
- Be good role models for young drivers and set a good example. Talk with your teens about responsible driving.



# Announcing New Employee Recognition

We are launching a new recognition effort for CMS with the introduction of our Exemplary Employee of the Month award. We want to share success stories and recognize the efforts of CMS staff who go above and beyond to deliver for our customers and colleagues.

I am pleased to announce that our inaugural recipient for the month of May is **Susan Robinson**, from the **Bureau of Benefits**. When Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) first rolled out, Susan was the first to learn many of the SAP application's functions and was committed to learning the system for Benefits. Once she had the know-how, she graciously offered to help other bureaus. Susan stepped in recently to help **CMS's Division of Vehicles**, its **Office of Finance and Management** and the **Bureau of Property Management (BoPM)**.

One example of her efforts is she adapted the spread sheet that BoPM uses to track and pay lease invoices for the fiscal year to make the process easier and faster. Susan created formulas and text fields in an SAP template that can be used for mass invoice uploads, so that all monthly property lease invoices can be processed at one time. Previously, every invoice had to be entered into the system manually and all fields in each filled out precisely. What used to take 3 weeks to pay an entire month's worth of bills now only takes about a day to complete. And, what used to require starting from scratch each month can now use the mass upload template that Susan created for BoPM.



*Left to right: CMS Acting Director Janel Forde, Benefits' Susan Robinson, Teresa Flesch, Deputy Director Bureau of Benefits*

Additionally, Susan helped the Division of Vehicles during the transition to cash management with vouchers at the Illinois Office of the Comptroller (IOC) and has assisted the CMS Office of Finance and Management with processing the FY20 budget in SAP, along with resolving the backlog of invoices created in SAP.

For the Bureau of Benefits' Susan Robinson and her collaborative spirit in lending a helping hand to other bureaus, we award our very first Exemplary Employee of the Month recognition. Congratulations and thank you, Susan!

If you would like to nominate a deserving CMS colleague as a future Exemplary Employee of the Month, please complete the **nominating form** and send it for consideration to [mike.deering@illinois.gov](mailto:mike.deering@illinois.gov).





## Employee Profile: Alejandra McClain



### Alejandra McClain

started working for CMS only in January, but already she is making a difference in the lives of people she serves. Alejandra is a bilingual Human Resources Associate for the **Bureau of Personnel's Disabled Workers Program**. She assists job candidates with disabilities as well as

those with English as a second language who might be challenged in the application process. Alejandra explains, "I answer questions for people with disabilities or those more comfortable speaking Spanish who are trying to navigate the process to become a State employee. I will set them up for testing and provide accommodations if they need it."

In the five months since arriving at CMS, she has worked with deaf and blind individuals and people living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS,) an auto-immune disease that damages the nervous system and disrupts communication between the brain and the body. She makes accommodations for them in the employment testing process. "I have also assisted people who suffer from anxiety disorders, who might need a quieter place complete the testing, and to work," Alejandra explains. Typically, employment testing for people with disabilities are conducted on Fridays at the State testing center located in the Capitol City Training Center at Lincoln Land Community College on Mason Street.

Prior to joining CMS, Alejandra worked at SIU-Springfield as a medical insurance representative and medical coder, ensuring physician and hospital medical claims were submitted properly. She arrived in Springfield with her family more than 20 years ago

from the Central American nation of Honduras and is fluent in English and Spanish. "I think some people might not understand that the Spanish speakers I help also speak English. They are working to fully integrate into American culture, but when it comes to taking a formal test, they might be challenged with the way questions are posed or may not understand certain words, so it takes them longer. They may often run out of time to complete the test, even though they are perfectly capable of answering the questions."

She compares the experience of these applicants to what an American with basic Spanish or Italian being dropped into Madrid or Rome might face when having to take a government exam. "One of the challenges – and they are certainly not alone – is they don't understand the hiring process for State government, what the due dates mean, that they have to test first to get on a competitive list of candidates before applying, the Rutan interview process, timing and so on."

When she is not helping people in the hiring process, Alejandra enjoys the outdoors and taking long walks with her husband of seven years and their two-year old son. "Winters here make you appreciate the good weather coming, but no matter the season, I just love helping people, it is rewarding when you help them understand things, and bilingual people and those with disabilities have much to offer if we just give them an opportunity."



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